

POCAHONTAS COUNTY

LOG DRIVES ON THE GREENBRIER 1876 - 1899

Timber, especially the white pine, was cut at the head of the river, all along the river and all navigable creeks. During the winter months the logs were skidded to the river and piled up in big landings. They were fixed in a way that they would have to be kicked loose before they would tumble into the river. Before spring an ark was built on the water. This would accommodate from 70 to 100 men, or whatever number was needed to make the drives. An ark was also built for the horses, and some experienced teamsters were taken along on the drive.

When spring opened, men were hired to make the drive down the river. The men hired for breaking up the jams had to have experience.

It sometimes took six or eight weeks to make the drive down the river to Ronceverte where the timber was sold and made into lumber. One morning the men decided to play a joke on a certain young teamster who always made a dash for the table when the bell was rung, and usually succeeded in being the first one there. A board was laid between the two arks to be used as a walk-way between them. Foam often covered it so that unless one observed closely he could not tell if it was there or not. Before breakfast one morning the men decided to remove this board and give this teamster a bath. The breakfast bell rang and he made a dash for the table, did not notice the board was gone therefore plunged into the river. He swam to the ark and crawled on deck cussing mad. The other men kept from laughing as long as they could, but finally they burst out laughing and after a while the teamster joined in with them and every one had a good laugh.

From - Pocahontas Times - March 11, 1926.

Someone usually kept a record of what happened each day. Some days we would go as far as 16 or 20 miles while on other days we could look back at dark and see where we had started from in the morning. Driving the logs was very dangerous.

but usually only experienced men were hired so the accidents were few. Only one man was ever drowned.

One man, Sam Sheets lost a foot by getting it caught in the coil of a rope that held the ark. When the rope snapped taut the foot was severed.

It took 65 dozen eggs for breakfast and a barrel of flour made biscuits enough for four meals. One spring, on our trip down the river, the ark broke in two and we lost our provisions, and were therefore without food for the remainder of the journey.

The following names are those I can remember, that helped to make these log drives:

Sam Sheets

Jack Noonan

Dave Smith

Charley Nottingham

Bland Nottingham

Adam Dilman

Pat Shughrow

Isaac Madison

Bill Madison

John Buckley

Jack Coughlan

Jack McLuskey

Bob Drew - killed by falling tree

Alex Butterbaugh

George Bambrick

Walter Byrd

John Will Carpenter

Hance Carpenter

Jake McLaughlin

George Dunbrack

James Green

James McHaffey

Clyde Kingport

John Driscall

A. E. Smith

John Walker

George Wagner

Jim Stretch

Pierce Wooddell

George E. Moore

I got this information from George Bambrick of Huntersville, W. Va., who drove the Greenbrier River for 20 springs and who once rode the Greenbrier River in a boat from Sittington to the point of Droop Mountain.

On February 17, 1893, a big log drive of ten thousand white pine logs came down Knapps Creek on a driving flood and took out a dam that had been built for a grist mill. The dam was never rebuilt but there was a big law suit. Here was an ancient dam destroyed by a great company, a new comer, and therefore vulnerable. An offer to build back the dam better than ever without cost and to fix it so the logs would float over it was indignantly rejected. Cash was preferred. The records show that after some dilatory matters were disposed of the case came on for trial before a jury at the October term 1895, with an array of lawyers on both sides and a host of witnesses. Judge A. N. Campbell was presiding. He instructed the jury that if logs could be floated in certain seasons in Knapps Creek without the aid of artificial means, that it was a floatable stream, and that no person had the right to obstruct it with a dam. The verdict was for the defendants. The mill was never restored. This was the case of the doctrine of navigable waters.

From - Court Records

O'Connell's log camp was near Durbin and with the coming of two rival railway construction crews the roaring days began. Durbin in those days was rough and ready. O'Connell's last drive was in 1901. Well known men of Pocahontas County were in the

crew. Names such as these were well known to the older generation. Sherman Sutton, Wise Gillespie, Harper Smith, Lewis Lynch and J. A. (Jimmie) Kirkpatrick. Mr. Kirkpatrick was the cook and his cookee was Roland Scott.

When the construction crew reached what is now Brocker, C. G. Sutton carried the mail to the camp. On days that he could not go his daughter Mrs. P. F. Eades carried the mail on horseback. A box was located on what is now the Lee Galford farm for one of the camps, and from there down to the river and back to Durbin following the railroad grade. N. B. Arbogast was the postmaster and Mrs. Eades was his assistant.

Days when O'Connell and the construction camps paid off were usually rough. Mrs. Eades says she has changed the mail while John Bell or Gratz Slavins stood guard with a winchester.

From - Mrs. P. F. Eades.

The St. Lawrence Boom and Lumber Company were the ones who took out this timber by log drives.

PEOPLE ATTRACTED BY TIMBERING - 1876 - 1925

Most of the lumber companies, who came into Pocahontas, brought with them the men who had been employed by them elsewhere. The St. Lawrence Boom and Lumber Company brought with them quite a number of French-Canadians. A few of them remained in the county, but most of the people, attracted by timbering were non land owners, transient laborers who lived in houses built by the company and who moved on when the company moved. Many of them, too, were unmarried men who went into the lumber camps on Cheat Mountain and stay there for weeks at a time, having no connections with the outside world what-so-ever. But when they did come to Cass and other towns there was sure to be much drinking, gambling, and just a general rough time. It was never very safe for a young, inexperienced man to come into Cass when the "hicks" were in town, that is if it was known he had any money. He was sure to lose his money if not his life. Most of the men with families however, were of the better type who were peaceable citizens. When the lumber company finished up and moved on most of these people went too, as there was

nothing to employ them. Most of these ~~lumber~~ towns were practically deserted and in a little while the houses were sold to the farmers who tore them down and used the lumber for out buildings on ~~the~~ farm.

Note: I could find nothing written on ~~this~~, so have had to write it from what I know, as much of the timbering was done ~~in~~ my time.

West Virginia Writers' Project

RESEARCH IDENTIFICATION REPORT

Pacahanta
Subject Commerce & Industry

Date 2/14/41

Research Worker Samuel G Smith

Date Research Taken 2/6, 12, /41

Typist Samuel G Smith

Date Typed 2/13/41

Source Henry Overholt. Marlinton. W. Va. Date Filed

G.H Simmons. Hillsboro. "

